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A Message from Arn van Iersel

As your Acting Deputy Minister, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this issue of *Family Matters*.

I believe one of the most important factors in building a healthy and successful organization is the ability to recognize and celebrate achievements – both at an individual and corporate level.

I consider our e-newsletter one of the best ways we, as a ministry, have to share information and highlight the excellent work of our staff and service providers across the province.

Arn van Iersel
Acting Deputy Minister

The 2005 Premier's Excellence and Innovation Awards provides us with another opportunity to recognize outstanding public service. This year, awards will be presented in the following categories: cross-government integration, innovation, leadership, organizational excellence, partnership and service excellence.

Last fall, Executive considered the outstanding and innovative work put forward by individuals and teams from across the ministry and, as a result, submitted six nominations to the Premier's Awards panel for consideration. I can assure you it was extremely difficult to choose from so many exceptional initiatives.

In this issue of *Family Matters*, we are featuring our ministry nominees. I believe some of our greatest strengths are the strong partnerships and collaborative relationships we share with service providers, community partners, and other ministries across government.

Nowhere is that more evident than in our nominees. While the categories they are nominated in vary, the success of each project could clearly not have been achieved without the collaboration and support of dozens of partners within the ministry and across the province. This work represents a small sample of the outstanding and innovative efforts made every day by staff, service providers, agencies and communities.

Short-listed Premier's Awards nominees are invited to attend the awards dinner in Victoria on March 29th. A reception hosted by MCFD to honour our short-listed nominees will take place earlier that day. To celebrate and acknowledge everyone whose work was put forward to Executive, the ministry will present each of those individuals with a gift certificate in recognition of their contribution to the public service.

Collectively, we are so much more than the sum of our parts. Although the outcome of the awards ceremony is unknown, it goes without saying that all our ministry nominees are winners. Please join me in congratulating everyone involved.

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Ministry of Children and Family Development
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca

FAMILY MATTERS
YOUR CONNECTION TO THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT & OUR SERVICE PROVIDERS

Finding the Way Home

We all know how important it is to feel connected to family and friends and experience life-long relationships. These connections help us develop our sense of identity and create a feeling of attachment and belonging in an often unknown world.

The desire to create that same connection for Aboriginal children in care was the motivation behind a new initiative to welcome kids home to their native communities – many of them for the first time.

Developed by Brenda Lewis, an MCFD adoption worker in Prince George, the one-day camps are intended to help Aboriginal children living with foster families connect with their culture and heritage through visiting their home communities and meeting their birth families. They also provide an opportunity to explore potential permanent homes for the children.

"I wanted to reunite children in care with their communities and extended families, with the hope of creating some permanent connections for them", said Brenda.

The camps are a collaborative effort between MCFD's North Region adoption staff and local Aboriginal communities and agencies. MCFD funds the camps, locates the children in care registered to that community and invites them to attend the camp with their social worker or foster parent.

Each camp is unique and is organized based on the community's cultural traditions. This past year, three camps were held. The Gitxaala Nation hosted a camp named La dm lu yeltgu k'abatguulk (Children Coming Home). The community of Lax Kw'alaams held a camp called Nuum Na Walt (Always Belonging: You Are Ours) and Nu Yiz also held a traditional camp in the name of their community.

Wilfred Sankey Sr., Marietta Helin and Lawrence Helin of the Lax Kwala'ams community welcome one of their children home.

Each community planned special activities to honour the children, including drumming and dancing, traditional feasts and tours of the communities. Children were also presented with traditional wall hangings and coloured vests that displayed their individual clan crests.

Chiefs and elders welcomed the children, and thanked foster parents for their support. Children learned of their clan history, the importance of their culture and were reminded to be proud of their heritage.

For many of the kids, the experience was a first. One teenage boy discovered that he was related to the chief. He later said "I learned respect for myself, for my people, and for my elders."

The camps not only introduced children to their families for the first time, but gave the families a chance to claim their children back. They too felt the strong connection and attachment to their new-found extended family. One member of Gixtaala said, "yesterday, you were strangers to us, but today you are not."

Peter Cunningham, Regional Executive Director for MCFD's North Region, says "the camps support good planning for children, highlight the cultural strengths of the community and build bridges between foster parents, ministry staff, and the aboriginal community...this is excellent work."

As a result of the camps, seven families are now in discussions with the ministry to find permanent placements for the children and eight other families now have ongoing contact and regular visits. Other children, who will be turning 18 soon, plan to visit on their own.

"The program has been a success beyond my wildest imagination!" exclaimed Brenda. In recognition of her outstanding work, Brenda has been nominated by the ministry for a Premier's Award for Leadership. Recently, Brenda learned she has been short-listed as a finalist for the award.

If you would like more information, or if you are interested in starting a similar program in your area, please contact Brenda.Lewis@gov.bc.ca.

Nominated for Leadership

Brenda Lewis, Acting Deputy Director of Child Welfare for the North Region

FAMILY MATTERS
YOUR CONNECTION TO THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT & OUR SERVICE PROVIDERS

Meet Beth James, Acting Associate Deputy Minister

I've been with MCFD now for just over six weeks, and one thing has been very clear during my short time here - the commitment and dedication of staff and service providers across the province is second to none.

In this issue of *Family Matters*, we are talking about the importance of relationships and, in particular, the role that partnerships play in our success.

For me, one of the key aspects of leadership is developing strong networks, both internally and externally. Partnerships with service providers, communities and government are integral to our success. The projects and initiatives that are profiled in this newsletter are just a sampling of what we can accomplish when we work together, and I applaud them.

Beth James
Acting Associate
Deputy Minister

Equally important are the networks, relationships and partnerships that are formed between all levels of the organization. In particular, I believe it is extremely important that our executive teams connect with staff. It is crucial that we hear from you, which is why one of my priorities is to visit as many MCFD offices as I can in the near future. You have a role in helping set the course for this ministry, and your ideas, suggestions and concerns are extremely valuable.

I also hope to meet with many of our service providers. These meetings are key to helping me learn about the business of the ministry and gain a sense of the pulse of the organization, as well as a feel for what is happening in communities across the province.

I want to express how much I respect the efforts and commitment of staff and service providers on behalf of the children and families of BC. Your knowledge and experience is the solid foundation on which this ministry is built. I look forward to meeting many of you soon. I also want to add my congratulations to all the ministry nominees for this year's Premier's Awards. Your contributions reflect the calibre of work undertaken across this organization every day. We are very proud of you!

New Plan Making A Difference for BC Kids

Most of us think of depression as an illness that primarily affects adults. But children and youth also suffer from depression, as well as other mental illnesses.

In fact, mental illnesses affect children to a greater degree than any other health problem in BC, with more than one in seven children (or more than 140,000) estimated to have a mental illness serious enough to cause significant suffering and impair their development.

In 2003, the government of BC developed the first plan in Canada that specifically addresses the needs of children and youth with mental illnesses. Three years later, that plan is making significant progress in improving the treatment and diagnosis of young people.

The five-year initiative includes new approaches to treatments, as well as additional financial and human resources to ensure the provision of more timely and effective treatment and support. The plan also includes the introduction of programs to reduce risk and prevent the effects of mental illness.

Nominated for Partnership

Child and Youth Mental Health Plan Implementation Team

Because of the breadth and complexity of the plan, and the number of organizations involved, it was clear from the outset that a collaborative approach was essential. An implementation team, consisting of five regional CYMH Transition Managers and 12 Headquarters program staff, worked collaboratively to establish relationships at the provincial, regional and local levels with education and health providers, family and community stakeholders, post-secondary institutions, physicians, Aboriginal communities, libraries and the Knowledge Network.

The success of these partnerships has led to major improvements in the child and youth mental health system throughout the province and resulted in the CYMH Plan Implementation Team receiving a ministry nomination for a Premier's Award for Partnership.

Once fully implemented in 2008, the plan will result in better treatment and support for an additional 20,000 children, each year, who suffer from mental illnesses – double the number currently supported.

Click here to learn more about the programs and initiatives of the BC Child and Youth Mental Health Plan.

Culture and Heritage Come Together

Nominated for
Service Excellence

Ktunaxa Kinbasket Child and Family Services & MCFD Interior Region

Three dancers are waiting to perform at the opening ceremonies of the Ktunaxa Kinbasket Child and Family Services agency.
Photo courtesy of the Aboriginal Peoples Family Accord

Collaboration between MCFD and two diverse Aboriginal nations is improving child and family services and leading to better health and well-being for all Aboriginal people living in the Ktunaxa territory.

Recently, an historic agreement was reached to transfer the delivery of child welfare services from MCFD to Ktunaxa Kinbasket Child and Family Services (KKCFS). The agency was formed through a partnership between MCFD's Interior Region, the Kootenay Region Métis Nation and the Ktunaxa Nation.

The agreement is unique in BC. For the first time, it brings together two distinct Aboriginal nations working under the same banner to provide services through a holistic approach to all Aboriginal people, including Métis Urban Aboriginals and Inuit, both on and off-reserve.

Aboriginal children and families in the area can now receive child welfare and early intervention services from an Aboriginal agency governed by Aboriginal peoples. Social services available from the agency include kinship, guardianship, health services, early childhood development, family support and recognition, justice advocacy and child protection.

"The arrangement is one that will benefit all Aboriginal children and families in the Kootenay area" says Gwen Phillips, an Aboriginal Peoples Family Accord board member. "We can now provide a more comprehensive set of services that respects each nation's traditions – this is an incredibly worthwhile initiative."

The positive impact of the project is evident. Since KKCFS took over service delivery, 42% of Aboriginal children in care who were once living away from their culture in non-Aboriginal homes are now living in Aboriginal homes. In addition, there has been a 50% increase in the number of families staying involved with, and having open access to, their children while in care.

"This project is a great example of the provincial government and First Nations working together to develop a new relationship founded on reconciliation, recognition and respect of Aboriginal rights and title" said Doug Hughes, MCFD Director of Operations for Aboriginal Services, Interior Region.

In fact, several MCFD social work staff are now on secondment to KKCFS, with plans to expand this in the coming months to include Child and Youth Mental Health Clinicians and Youth Probation Officers.

The success of the project was recently celebrated through traditional Métis and Ktunaxa ceremonies. As part of those festivities, the Prairie Chicken Dance was performed in public by a member of Ktunaxa Nation for only the fourth time ever.

Gwen feels one of the reasons KKCFS has been so successful is because both nations accepted each other's heritage. She believes that acceptance "will ultimately add strength to the union and the agency."

Learn more about Ktunaxa Kinbasket Child and Family Services here.

SIGN ME UP

Please add me to your electronic distribution list.

HELP is on the Way

How can I help my child grow into a healthy and successful adult? Are there supports available in my community to assist me? These are tough questions, but recently, a group of BC researchers, in partnership with MCFD, have developed a tool that has the answers.

In 2002, MCFD and the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) joined together with government and community partners to begin gathering critical information about early childhood development (ECD) in BC.

Nominated for Partnership

MCFD and the Human Early Learning Partnership

The partnership resulted in BC being the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement an evaluation tool that produces population-based maps of child development across the province. These maps were combined to create the BC Atlas of Child Development. The Atlas examines factors affecting ECD, including family income, parental education, parenting style, neighbourhood safety and cohesion, socio-economic differences, and the ability to access quality child care and developmental opportunities.

"The Atlas is crucial to raising awareness of the importance of early childhood development," says Robin Syme, MCFD Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for ECD. "What we learn from the Atlas will lead to better policy, improved community services and better school programs for ECD."

By mapping information by neighbourhood, researchers can better understand how various factors influence children's development and health. In turn, policy makers and community members can use this information to develop effective policies and programs to help children get the best possible start in life.

The Atlas incorporates a tool that evaluates how ready children are to enter school. The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a short test given to Kindergarten children to measure their characteristics in five areas: physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, cognitive knowledge and communication skills. In fact, BC is the first region in the world to have EDI data available on a provincial/jurisdictional basis.

The results of the EDI have led to new literacy programs, parent involvement in early learning school activities and the development of play groups to improve children's overall social development.

As a result of the HELP partnership, the future is much brighter for BC kids. We can now monitor early learning and determine how communities are doing in supporting young children and their families. Most importantly, we can better understand how environments and circumstances can be modified to improve children's chances for success.

"We can't underestimate the importance of this initiative," says MCFD Deputy Minister Arn van Iersel. "Working together, we can find the keys to unlock the essential ECD information that will give BC kids the head start they need."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 27 - 31: Social Work Week

April 6 - 7: Mental Health and the Justice System Across the Lifespan, Forensic Psychiatric Conference, Vancouver

April 6 - 8: Helping Canadian Kids Thrive! National Conference on Positive Youth Development Calgary

April 7 - 8: Empowering Voices Annual Regional FASD Conference, Kamloops

April 23 - 29: Administrative Professionals Week

April 30 - May 4: 17th International Conference on the Reduction of Drug Related Harm, Vancouver

May 1 - 7: Mental Health Week

May 11 - 13: 7th National Conference on Shared Mental Health Care, Calgary

May 11 - 16: Expanding Our Horizons Early Childhood Educators of BC Annual Conference, Richmond

May 11: Supporting Children's Social and Emotional Health: Assessment Tools, Research and Practice Vancouver

May 15: International Day of Families

May 23 - 26: Aboriginal Awareness Week

Partnerships for Stronger Families

Nominated for Partnership

MCFD Ridge Meadows Intake and Assessment Team & Westcoast Family Resources Society

A number of new practices in child welfare are improving outcomes for children and families across the province. In Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, a unique partnership between MCFD and the Westcoast Family Resources Society (WFRS) is taking one of those practices to a new level.

Family Development Response (FDR) is an innovative approach that helps families stay together and work through their troubles. The aim of the program is to move away from solely conducting investigations to a more flexible response that emphasizes and builds on the strengths and capacity of families.

Used in situations where families need extra support and guidance, and after the safety of the child has been assessed, FDR is a solutions-based approach to keeping families together. Many communities across BC currently offer FDR, and the program continues to expand throughout the province.

In April 2004, MCFD and WFRS joined together to implement FDR in the Ridge Meadows area. WFRS appointed two outreach workers to work with the MCFD intake and assessment team. MCFD screens families who are eligible for FDR, then both organizations work with the family to determine a plan to address concerns and monitor outcomes.

> "families have indicated that FDR is a supportive 'hands-on' approach, and perceive it to be a more sensitive way to meet their needs."

"We see great value in working with families in this way," says Alanna Robson, MCFD Community Services Manager in Ridge Meadows. "Families have responded very well to the program and have had excellent results."

The plan focuses on the family's immediate needs in order to promote stability and build resilience in the home. It also assists families to identify specific issues that are a challenge for them and require further support and intervention. The WFRS outreach workers are responsible for implementing the plan and ensuring the family is connected to community resources to assist them.

Ann Kutcher, Executive Director of WFRS, says "families have indicated that FDR is a supportive 'hands-on' approach, and perceive it to be a more sensitive way to meet their needs in terms of family concerns, community connections and available services."

Families also say the approach has helped them solve their problems in a more effective way, and that their own goals were met. One parent noted "our personal views and circumstances were taken into consideration and that made all the difference to us."

To learn more about FDR, please e-mail: MCF.StandardsPolicy@gov.bc.ca

A Little Recognition Goes a Long Way

Formal recognition, such as awards programs, plays an important role in helping build a positive and healthy work environment.

However, you might be surprised to learn that that the informal recognition that takes place everyday between supervisors and their staff, and among colleagues, means more to employees than any other form of acknowledgement.

Informal recognition is about showing appreciation for employees' contributions and achievements. It has a significant impact on individuals' job satisfaction and increases the level of engagement employees feel at work .

> "the informal recognition that takes place everyday...means more to employees than any other form of acknowledgement."

So take the time today to say thank you to someone for a job well done or celebrate the success of a team or colleague you work with.

What's in it for you? Knowing that you have made someone's day a little bit brighter.

For more information visit the BC Public Service Agency at: http://www.hrtoolkit.gov.bc.ca/recognition/awards_biz_case.htm

Cooperation Nets Big Results

Individuals with developmental disabilities and their families told government they wanted more choice, flexibility and input into designing the services they receive. After four years of planning, that dream became a reality on July 1, 2005, when responsibility for services for individuals with developmental disabilities was transferred from MCFD to Community Living British Columbia (CLBC).

In total, eight organizations came together to accomplish something never before done: establish one organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities. The result was the creation of CLBC, the largest Crown Agency in BC and the first integrated community living service delivery model in the world.

Nominated for Cross-Government Integration

CLBC Devolution Team

Strong collaboration was crucial to the project's success. The complex integration of services involved MCFD, the Interim Authority for CLBC, the Ministries of Finance, Labour and Citizen Services, and the Auditor General, as well as the Public Service Agency, Treasury Board and CLBC itself. A devolution team, including representatives from the various organizations, ensured all the pieces came together.

Planning for CLBC began in 2002, but much of the detailed work to transfer the services, systems, staff and programs to CLBC was completed in six months. This included the reassignment of over 400 staff, the establishment of a separate insurance program, the development of policies and procedures, communicating with thousands of individuals, families and contracted caregivers and service providers, and the migration of five complex financial management, human resource management, and client information systems.

"The work of the CLBC devolution team was remarkable. They accomplished what initially seemed impossible – moving from project planning to implementation in a six-month period," says Shelley Gilberg, who led MCFD's Community Living Services during the transition, and is now Executive Director, Common IT Services, Ministry of Labour and Citizen's Services.

CLBC was designed to give those living with a developmental disability and their families a much greater say in how they are supported. If the efforts of those involved in establishing CLBC is any indication, the organization is on the right track.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

Are you a staff member or service provider involved in delivering an innovative program or service? Do you know someone who deserves to be recognized?

Click on the link below to send us your idea in 100 words or less and your suggestion may be featured in a future article.

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